

INTERNAL DISCUSSION DRAFT - 3

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW

POLICY PAPER #4

6/16 Average Single Family/Multi-family Density Assumptions

DATE: July 18, 2000

POLICY: 6/16 Density Assumption

Background

This issue is not based on a legal precedent or remand from the Hearings Board. It is based on the recommendations of the Task Force established in 1994 to develop the "vacant lands analysis." This density target is part of the "Key Indicators" in the Comprehensive Plan (Chapter 2, Page 2- 16). Observing actual new construction will determine if targeted residential densities are being achieved.

The adopted vacant lands analysis used to determine how large the UGA's must be to accommodate population targets included an assumption that new single family development will occur at an average density of 6 net units per acre (not including roads, critical lands, etc.), and that new multi-family units will average 16 net units per acre. It was assumed that given the variety of multi-family zoning, ranging from 12 to 43 units per acre, new development would occur at an average of 16 units per acre. This assumption was based on an assessment of densities being constructed at that time.

The Community Framework Plan (CFP) envisions similar densities in major centers, which have or will have urban densities of development between 6 and 10 units per net residential acre (4.5 to 7.5 gross units per acre) as an overall average. Areas along high capacity transit corridors and priority public transit areas may have higher than average densities and other areas would have lower densities (e.g. established neighborhoods and neighborhoods on the fringes of the urban area).

Small towns and Community Centers....will have employment opportunities and lower densities than major centers, averaging between 4 and 8 acres per net residential acres (3 to 6 gross units per acre).

ORIGINAL INTENT

The policy makers' and community selection of the Hometown option as a development pattern in the Framework Plan results in a policy choice that

concentrates growth in urban centers, with lesser densities in other parts of the urban areas. Each urban center separate and distinct from the others and each containing a different combination of housing, shopping, and employment. Outside the urban areas, land will be predominantly rural with farm, forest and open space, with large lot residences. Shopping or business would be in rural centers.

The single family policy of a range of 6 to 10 units per net acre for new residential development as a plan goal for urban areas responded to the GMA requirement to move toward an urban growth pattern. It also reflected local preferences and the constraints of pre-existing development patterns. Staff and stakeholders, working together and with the concurrence of policy makers, began to use 6 units per acre, the bottom of the range, as the measurement for successful progress.

The sixteen units per net acre measurement for new multifamily residential development is an extension of the plan single family policy. It is based on the interrelationship of the extent of multifamily planned acres in the plan, the range of allowed multi-family densities, and the plan goal for 40 percent of new housing to be achieved in multi-family housing types.

The Supporting data tables illustrate progress toward these policies and measurements since 1995.

What issues have come up in discussion of this subject?

Some people question the density targets, saying they are too high. Some people believe that the market will not sustain development at this density in Clark County communities and that the targets cannot be achieved in this climate of consumer preference and in this economy. Others believe that the densities do not reflect community values and will result in a declining quality of life.

Some people believe that the density targets are not high enough. They believe that the targets, if higher, would support more constrained urban growth boundaries and provide better quality of life, both inside and outside the boundaries. They conclude that the 6/16 rule is the base level of density for an urban environment and, although the densities are a change from historical levels, they are barely urban in character. These people believe that quality design is key to livable density that is supported by the community.

Others believe that the urban density targets of 6/16 are being met by actual development that has occurred since 1994, and that continuation of these targets

is important to encourage housing affordability, to provide for development in an urban form which is less costly to serve, and to accommodate population growth more efficiently.

Some people believe that regardless of the target chosen, the planning process has been lax in definitions and monitoring, and that progress must be made in these areas.

Options for Change:

Eliminate the policy.

Implications: It will be very difficult to assess the reasonableness of the size of urban growth boundaries without a density target. Developing at higher densities in urban centers and lower densities elsewhere in urban areas is a key factor in the Hometown principle, and it will be difficult to communicate the concept without a density target. It will be difficult to monitor progress toward the plan unless there is a target. It is doubtful that the Hearings Board will accept a plan without a density policy.

Write explicit single family and multifamily policies.

Implications: Currently, the multifamily policy is an extension of the single-family policy and the inter-relationship of several other plan policies. Stating both a single family and multifamily plan policy is an option and might provide a greater level of detail for planners and the development community. As an alternative for greater clarification, the policies might be framed as policies for attached and detached housing units.

Define “Major Cities”, “Medium Cities” and “Small Towns” and create a density target for each definition.

Implication: This would recognize the different growth patterns typically found in towns of different sizes. Depending on the densities selected, the policy may or may not encourage higher densities to be achieved by each jurisdiction, but could simply maintain existing development densities. It may also reinforce existing density patterns that result in only one jurisdiction taking all the higher density housing.

Write one density policy that applies to both single family and multifamily density.

Implication: Another option is to state one policy that incorporates both single family and multifamily development and provides an average for both. This might provide more flexibility for planners and developers in achieving the goal. It might also reduce some data management problems with housing types such as condominiums or townhomes, which tend to have the form of multifamily units and the tenure of single family units. A range of density options is shown in the following table:

Using 6 SF and
16 MF units per
acre density

SF%	MF%	Avg. Density (units per acre)
75%	25%	8.5
70%	30%	9
65%	35%	9.5
60%	40%	10
55%	45%	10.5
50%	50%	11

Using 5 SF and
21 MF units per
acre density

SF%	MF%	Avg. Density (units per acre)
75%	25%	9
70%	30%	9.8
65%	35%	10.6
60%	40%	11.4
55%	45%	12.2
50%	50%	13

SF%	MF%	Avg. Density (units per acre)
75%	25%	6
70%	30%	6.4
65%	35%	6.8
60%	40%	7.2
55%	45%	7.6
50%	50%	8

Increase the proposed density.

Implication: Increased density would reinforce the urban character of the UGA's. Government and the development community would be challenged to respond to the density requirement with new development practices and financing. Higher density would reduce pressure to increase the size of UGA's. Because costs for infrastructure tend to occur in a "U Curve" relationship to increasing density, analysis of whether or not service costs would increase or decrease would be necessary. This option could be applied with the one density or two density policy approaches.

Senate Bill 6094 requires a determination that the plan assumptions, such as the 6/16 target, as measure against actual development are consistent. If the plan assumptions and actual development are not consistent, then SB 6094 requires the county to look at reasonable measures to meet the planning goals internally prior to considering actions such as expanding UGA's.

Decrease the proposed density.

Implication: Decreased density targets would make it easier for the market place to retain current practices and to transition, more slowly, to a growth management scenario. Lower density would increase pressure to increase the size of UGA's. This option could be applied with the one density or two density policy approaches. This option should not be considered until the requirements of SP 6094 have been satisfied.

Maintain current density targets.

Implication: Preliminary data, based on the first 5 years of the 20 year plan shows that the density targets are achievable.

Raise the measurement for success to a point higher in the density range.

Implications: Currently, success in meeting the plan threshold is measured against the 6/16 target. It is possible to establish a higher density target.

Steering Committee Discussion –

Action Taken –

Supporting Data

From Page 62 & 63 of Plan Monitoring Report

Single-Family Density

Current information was collected from the Clark County Assessment database. The total number of single family and multi-family units may not add up exactly as elsewhere in this report because only those developments in lands zoned single family or multi-family were counted. Information was collected for new single-family developments based on property type codes and building permit year. The total number of single-family lots were counted along with the acreage for all development. The number of new units was divided by the total acres to derive an average residential density for single-family development. The information was limited to development inside Urban Growth Areas.

Table 1.8.1 Single Family Density by UGA 1995-1999

Urban Growth Boundary	Units	Acres	Units per Acre
LaCenter	290	79.11	3.7
Yacolt	50	14.71	3.4
Ridgefield	114	105.80	1.1
Battle Ground	1,163	243.16	4.8
Vancouver	9,796	1,838.45	5.3
Camas	1,290	306.64	4.2
Washougal	332	120.40	2.8
Total	13,035	2708.27	4.8

Source: Clark County Assessment Database, June 2000.

The following formula was used to determine average density:

$$\text{Units} / \text{Acres} = \text{Density}$$

$$13,035 / 2,708.27 = 4.8$$

Multi-Family Density

Current information was collected from the Clark County Assessment database. Property type codes and building permit information was used to determine new multi-family development from 1995 to present. Development outside urban growth areas was excluded. Mobile home parks, mobile home condominiums, and single-family type condominium developments were included in the analysis. The number of new units was divided by the total acres to derive an average residential density for multi-family development.

Table 1.8.2 Multi-Family Density by UGA 1995-1999

Urban Growth Boundary	Units	Acres	Units per Acre
LaCenter	16	2.00	8.0
Ridgefield	4	0.61	6.5
Battle Ground	155	9.42	16.5
Vancouver	3,368	205.93	16.4
Camas	133	9.05	14.7
Washougal	108	6.32	17.1
Total	3,784	233.33	16.2

Source: Clark County Assessment Database, June 2000.

The following formula was used to determine average density:

$$\text{Units} / \text{Acres} = \text{Density}$$

$$3,784 / 233.33 = 16.2$$

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